



Milestones in women's history

National and International Policy on Women's Rights

Achievements

- 1895 South Australia became the first State to accord women the right to vote. The other States followed: Western Australia (1899), New South Wales (1902), Tasmania (1903), Queensland (1905), Victoria (1908) Northern Territory and ACT (1911).
- 1897 Catherine Spence, first woman to stand as political candidate in Australia. She stood as SA delegate to the Federal Convention, although told she could not sit even if she won.
- 1902 Non-Aboriginal women gained the right to vote in Federal elections thus acquiring equal suffrage with men in the first Federal election (1903). (In the USA, female suffrage in a national election was not achieved until 1920, and in the UK women did not achieve voting equality with men until 1928.)
- 1921 WA Edith Cowan elected to Legislative Assembly as member for West Perth, the first woman elected to any Australian Parliament. She served in the Western Australian Legislative Assembly until 22 March 1924.
- 1937 VIC Ivy Weber was Victoria's second woman parliamentarian but the first to win a seat at a general election. She won and held the seat of Nunawading as an independent.
- 1962 The Menzies Liberal and Country Party government gave the Commonwealth vote to all Aborigines – enrolling optional, voting compulsory if enrolled.
- 1966 Sen. Annabelle Rankin becomes Minister for Housing, and thus the first woman to administer a government department.
- 1973 Elizabeth Reid, first advisor appointed to Prime Minister on matters relating to women.
- 1975 The first Sex Discrimination Act in Australia was passed by the South Australian Parliament (the Sex Discrimination Act 1975).
- 1975 The Australian Government held the first national conference on the status of women (Women and Politics) and committed Australia to celebrating International Women's Day with other member nations of the United Nations.
- 1980 TAS Gillian James, first female Minister.
- 1983 Australia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against

Women (CEDAW).

Sen. Susan Ryan is the first Labor woman federal minister.

- 1984 As the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women, Senator Ryan introduced the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*.
- 1993 The Commonwealth Sex Discrimination Act 1984 was strengthened. Amendments included adding dismissal on the grounds of family responsibilities as a ground for complaint, and amending the definition of 'sexual harassment', so that complainants no longer needed to show that they had suffered any disadvantage or detriment.
- 1995 Beijing Declaration at the World Conference on Women declares "women's rights are human rights". The Platform for Action adopted at the conference contains dozens of references to human rights pertaining to women.
- 2000 As a result of the UN Millennium Summit, the eight Millennium Development Goals were set to be achieved by 2015. Two of these goals were to promote gender equality and empower women and improve maternal health.
- 2002 Ms Jenny Macklin MP elected as Deputy Leader of the Australian Labor Party, becomes the first woman to hold such a position in either of the two major political parties.
- NT Marion Scrymgour the first female Aboriginal minister in any government in the history of Australia.
- 2007 Ms Julia Gillard MP becomes Deputy Prime Minister.
- 2008 In May, the Australian Government established the National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children. The Council comprises eleven members, each with extensive knowledge and expertise in the fields of domestic and family violence and sexual assault.
- 2008 In November, Australia became the 94th country to accede to the Optional Protocol to CEDAW (the UN Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women), nine years after the Protocol was opened for signature and ratification. This means individuals can bring complaints to the CEDAW Committee against a Government about an alleged breach of the rights under the Convention. That Government must then respond to the findings of the CEDAW Committee, including information about action taken in light of the views and recommendations of the Committee.
- 2010 The Hon Julia Gillard MP becomes Australia's first female Prime Minister.

Women's Rights at Work and in the Family

Achievements

- 1883 The first of the Married Women's Property Acts to be passed successively in the Australian States to give married women the same legal position regarding property as unmarried women.
- 1961 The Matrimonial Causes Act came into force, giving the right for separation alone (of five years) as grounds for divorce.
- 1966 The bar on married women as permanent employees in the Federal Public Service was abolished.
- 1969 Zelda D'Aprano chained herself to the Commonwealth Building in Melbourne. 35 years later (2004) she was awarded the Officer of the Order of Australia in recognition of her campaigning on women's workplace issues.

After decades of campaigning, Australian women workers win equal pay rates with men doing comparable work under an Arbitration Commission decision for incremental increases, with pay parity eventually achieved in 1972.

- 1986 The Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986, (now known as the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999), was passed by the Federal Parliament.
- 1989 The official launch of the National Foundation for Australian Women.
- 1990 The Australian Government ratified International Labour Organisation Convention 156 on Workers with Family Responsibilities (ILO 156), the aim of which is to enable workers with family responsibilities who are employed, or who wish to be employed, to do so without discrimination and without conflict between their employment and their family responsibilities. The ratification came into effect on 30 March 1991.
- 1998 A Government-appointed Independent Committee completed a Regulatory Review of the Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986. The Review provided an opportunity for all interested parties to comment on the effectiveness of the legislation. The Government has now responded to the recommendations of the Independent Committee, and is in the process of implementing the reforms.
- 1999 The review resulted in changes to the Affirmative Action Act which was renamed Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999.

Maternity Leave

Achievements

- 1973 The Maternity Leave Act 1973 provided for maternity leave for Federal public servants.
- 1979 The ACTU Maternity Leave test case set the standard in all awards for 52 weeks of unpaid maternity leave for women.
- 2008 The Federal Government commissioned the Productivity Commission to conduct an Inquiry into Paid Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave. The Draft Inquiry Report was released in September 2008 and the Final Report is due to be presented to the Government in February 2009.
- 2010 01 January Australia's first national Paid Parental Leave scheme started, fully funded by the Government. It provides eligible working parents with 18 weeks of Parental Leave Pay at the National Minimum Wage, currently \$570 a week before tax.

Women in Leadership

Achievements

- 1985 Helen Williams was appointed as Secretary of the Department of Education, the first woman to head a Federal government department (1985-87).
- 1986 Janine Haines became the first female leader of a political party in the Federal Parliament.
- 1990 Deidre O'Connor became the first female Federal Court Judge and President of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.
- 1995 Dr Wendy Craik became the first female director of the National Farmers' Federation.
- 1996 Jennie George became the first woman President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions.
- 1997 Penny Wensley was appointed Australia's Ambassador to the United Nations, the most senior external appointment ever given to a woman in the Australian Foreign Service.
- 2004 Heather Ridout became the first female chief executive of the Australian Industry Group.
- 2007 Julia Gillard became Australia's first female Deputy Prime Minister and first female acting Prime Minister.
- 2008 Australia's first female Governor-General, Quentin Bryce, was appointed.

Gender Pay Equity

Achievements

- 1912 A minimum wage for women's work was set by Mr Justice Higgins in the first Federal Arbitration award for women. (Until 1950 this was usually 54 per cent of the male rate.)
- 1921 Edith Cowan became the first woman in an Australian parliament when she was elected to the Lower House of the Western Australian Parliament.
- 1942 The Women's Employment Board was formed to draft women into essential war-time work at higher rates of pay.
- 1950 The Federal Arbitration Court made the first determination of a female basic wage which was set at 75 per cent of the male basic wage.
- 1958 The Industrial Arbitration (Female Rates) Amendment Act 1958 of New South Wales provided that upon application the Industrial Commission of New South Wales shall include in awards and industrial agreements provision for equal pay between the sexes. Where applicable, equal pay under such awards was to be phased in by 1963.
- 1969 The Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission ruled that 'equal pay for equal work' was to be phased in by 1972.
- 1972 The Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission extended the equal pay concept to 'equal pay for work of equal value', to be fully implemented by 30 June 1975.
- 1983 The National Wage Case was held, following which, the Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission (ACAC) acknowledged that women were underpaid and their work was undervalued. However, it was at the same time acknowledged that the economy could not sustain paying commensurate women's wages.
- 1985-86 The Australian Conciliation and Arbitration Commission affirmed the equal pay principles of the 1972 equal pay case but rejected the comparable worth concept.
- 1990 The Equal Pay Unit in the Department of Industrial Relations was established.
- 1997 The NSW Industrial Relations Commission conducted a Pay Equity Inquiry, which reported to the Minister for Industrial Relations in 1998. The Inquiry found that there is a gender-based wage gap, and that the female-dominated occupations examined are underpaid in comparison to work of equal value done by men.

- 2008 EOWA declared 27 August Australia's first national 'Equal Pay Day', the day when women's average salary caught up to what men had earned the previous financial year by 30 June 2008.
- 2008 The Government commissioned a House of Representatives Inquiry on Pay Equity and Associated Issues Related to Increasing Female Participation in the Workforce. The Committee's report is due for release in 2009.
- 2009 On 23 November 2009, the House Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations tabled its report on the inquiry into pay equity and associated issues related to increasing female participation in the workforce entitled *Making it fair*.

Discrimination and Harassment in the Workplace; Violence against Women

Achievements

- 1990 The National Committee on Violence Against Women was established.
 - 1992 The 'Stop Violence Against Women' Community Education Programme and ATSIC Family Violence Intervention Programme were established.
 - 1992 Amendments to the Sex Discrimination Act were made including proof of sexual harassment no longer required, applying sexual harassment law to students 16 years of age and over and discrimination on the basis of a person's family responsibilities is unlawful.
 - 1993 The Industrial Relation Reform Act 1993 was passed by the Federal Parliament. The Act prevents discrimination on a wide range of grounds and requires the Industrial Relations Commission to take into account ILO 156 (workers with family responsibilities), among others.
 - 1996 The Federal Workplace Relations Act 1996 was passed, which retains equal remuneration and parental leave provisions, and prohibits discrimination on a number of grounds including sex, marital status, family responsibilities and pregnancy.
 - 2008 The National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children was established.
 - 2009 The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women – Immediate Government Actions April 2009 released.
- Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009-2021 released.

Indigenous Employees

Achievements

- 1962 The right to vote in Commonwealth elections was formally extended to Indigenous Australians under an amendment to the Commonwealth Electoral Act (non-Indigenous women gained the right to vote in 1902)
- 1967 The referendum amended the Constitution to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in official population counts.
- 1976 Pat O'Shane became Australia's first Aboriginal barrister. (in 1986, she became the first Aboriginal woman to be appointed a Magistrate in NSW)
- 1985 The Aboriginal Women's Unit was established in the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs.
- 1996 Gloria Shipp became the first Aboriginal woman to be ordained as an Anglican Priest.
- 2001 Carol Martin was the first Aboriginal woman to be elected to an Australian Parliament (WA State Govt)
- 2008 On 13 February, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivered Australia's formal apology to the stolen generations.
- 2008 EOWA and the Minister for the Status of Women awarded the first inaugural Business Achievement Award for Outstanding EEO Practice in the Advancement of Indigenous Women. The winner of the award was SDN Children's Services Inc.